DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 419 421 FL 025 268

AUTHOR Hough, David A.
TITLE Learning Culture: Practicing Change. A Critical Approach to Learning and Teaching Culture in the EFL Classroom in Japan.
PUB DATE 1997-10-00
NOTE 22p.; Based on a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (23rd, Hamamatsu, Japan, October 1997).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052) -- Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; Course Content; *Cultural Education; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; Global Approach; Higher Education; *Intercultural Communication; *International Studies; Second Language Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Japan; Vygotsky (Lev S); *Zone of Proximal Development

ABSTRACT

A university teacher of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Japan draws on teaching experience and a classroom experiment to discuss how a socio-historical analysis of culture can be combined with intercultural communication and global issues to supplement learning and teaching in the college-level EFL curriculum. Students were asked to make a list of five things about culture that they would like to know by the end of the semester. Participants in three teacher training workshops were asked a similar question about teaching. Results indicated students wanted answers to highly specific questions, whereas teachers had more general questions reflecting greater abstraction. This suggests a Vygotskian view of developmental changes in thinking processes and, in particular the theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Implications for ZPD in pedagogy and diagnosis of student developmental level are examined, and classroom techniques are discussed briefly. (Contains 40 references.) (MSE)

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Learning Culture: Practicing Change

A Critical Approach to Learning and Teaching Culture in the EFL Classroom in Japan

by

David A. Hough

Based on a Workshop Given at *JALT 97* in Hamamatsu, Japan

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David Hough

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Learning Culture, Practicing Change: A Critical Approach to Learning and Teaching Culture in the EFL Classroom in Japan

David A. Hough
Shonan Institute of Technology

Without the awareness that one has the capacity to adapt to history, we are left with trying to adapt to society (e.g., to racism and stigma), or as psychologists and educators, trying to help people in this process. — **Lois Holzman, *History is the Cure***

Abstract

In this paper I review some of the insights I have gained thus far in attempting to combine a sociohistorical analysis of culture with the practice of doing content-based intercultural communication and global issues learning/teaching in the EFL university classroom in Japan. Taken in part from a workshop given at the *JALT97 Conference* in Hamamatsu, I attempt in this paper to move beyond the pragmatics of language teaching pedagogy to consider liberating political and social agendas. As such, this paper is intended as a contribution to the emerging discussion on critical approaches to TESOL in general. The theoretical groundwork for this approach comes from the dialectical and historical materialism of Marx, the sociohistorical school of psychology of L.S. Vygotsky and A.R. Luria, and the liberation pedagogy of Paulo Freire. It views both culture and learning as (1) a sociohistorical process which (2) is driven by material necessity and (3) is further conditioned by dialectical praxis. By analyzing culture and learning in this way, I believe that students and teachers can begin to work together to change their circumstances and create new histories.

Why Teach Or Learn About Culture In The EFL Classroom In Japan?

As I see it, the primary goal of learning and teaching culture in the EFL classroom in Japan is to build self awareness which leads to liberation[1]. This process is first interpersonal (i.e., involving interaction with others) and then intrapersonal (i.e., developing into self awareness and voluntary action).[2] At both levels, it is inherently social. It is also value laden.

This is particularly important in ELF classrooms such as Japan where Anglo-American cultural values vie with local institutional standards for control of curriculum content, testing, teaching methodology and research.

Given this sociohistorical context, we are inevitably left with the question of relevancy: how relevant are any of these values (Anglo-American or Japanese) for our students? To what extent will they result in self awareness and liberation?

Certainly, self awareness which leads to liberation for an inner city African American or an Ainu or an Okinawan will not be the same as it is for a Rockefeller or a Shibusawa. Nor will it be the same for the worker who is facing a layoff because of global economic restructuring and the CEO of a multinational corporation.

But how about the values which have our students memorizing President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address or practicing mythical conversations about dreamlike jet-setter vacations around the world? To what extent will they help the Japanese university student faced with increasingly uncertain career opportunities? To what extent also, do these values reflect the economic and career-path realities of us as teachers?

Phillipson (1992) argues that "The belief that ELT is non-political serves to disconnect culture from structure. It assumes that educational concerns can be divorced from social, political and economic realities" (p. 67). Likewise, Levine (1993) argues, the history of teaching English as an additional language "is a history riddled with race, class, cultural and linguistic prejudice, a history of

[1] I use Freire's term *liberation* here instead of *empowerment* because I see the latter as assimilative and marginalizing.

[2] From a Vygotskian perspective, interpersonal processes are transformed into intrapersonal processes. Thus "cultural development appears twice: first on the social level and later on the individual level, first *between* people (*interpsychological*), and then *inside* the child (*intrapsychological*). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57).

both official and unofficial obstruction to educational development" (p. 190). Tollefson (1991) takes this a step further when he states:

> Language education professionals must reject the notion that learning a language is an ideologically neutral act simply intended to develop an employment skill. That some people must learn English to get a job is a *result* of unequal relationships of power — not a *solution* to them. (p. 210)

Let us look briefly at the ELT textbook market in Japan. First, there are locally produced EFL texts of the bilingual, grammar translation variety. These books are generally sensitive to local pedagogy and cultural mythology, and serve national interests in that they support testing systems that preserve structural inequalities of power. That is, they match the pyramid of the managerial class to the pyramid of advancement by testing. In this last regard, it is not necessary that such EFL textbooks serve any real communicative function (Law, 1995).

In contrast, global EL texts (i.e., those produced by major US and UK publishers and intended for the world market), are generally both monolingual and communicative, and based on idealized Anglo-American patterns of linguistic and cultural behavior. These include individualistic values which require students to take responsibility for their learning and assume "that problems and solutions are located in individual students rather than in historical and structural forces largely beyond their control" (Tollefson, 1991, p. 101).

In terms of content, they generally fail to take into consideration the real life communication needs of EFL students who may require the language to interact with other non-native speakers (Senduk & Inkiriwang, 1995). Such global texts include lessons on Western greetings, introductions, compliments, small talk, etc., which may be inappropriate for interactions among, say, Japanese, Vietnamese and Indonesians, while excluding culturally appropriate local equivalents.

In addition, they often include discussion topics which are highly personal, taboo (or, at best, simply irrelevant) in the local culture. A very common problem in Japan, this produces what Tollefson (1991) refers to as "pragmatic paradox," where students find themselves unable to respond (p. 101).

Even when such textbooks are used by students who intend to study in an English speaking country such as the U.S., it is questionable whether they will empower the students to overcome many

of the everyday problems they will face. Tollefson (1991) cites lessons on housing which teach student responsibility to pay rent but ignore landlord responsibility to maintain health and safety standards, or lessons on finances which introduced idealized dialogues on how to get loans when most students — and many teachers, as well — would not qualify (p. 101).

Not only are issues of socioeconomic (i.e., class) inequality missing from global EL texts, issues of gender and race are glossed over in idealized fashion as aspects of cultural diversity. By failing to critically address the structural causes of exploitation and prejudice, the onus for conflict resolution inevitably falls on the individual (and all too often, the victim). As a result, social problems — if addressed at all — are reduced to issues of psychological attribution.

A major reason for this failure is that global EL texts tend to promote the cultural myth of equal opportunity and upward class mobility resulting from the acquisition of salable skills (including English). As such, they espouse principles of reward[1] based on equity rather than equality or need. In this regard, they reflect highly competitive capitalist work-ethic values which cross-cultural research has shown are far from universal (Hui and Triandis, 1984; Tornblom and Foa, 1983; Mahler, Greenberg & Hayashi, 1981; Berman, Murphy-Berman & Singh, 1985).

To see how pervasive this type of cultural mythology is, I asked a group of Japanese university students to examine the artwork and photographs in a popular global English textbook for international communication. They counted a total of 325 individuals (171 men and 154 women), out of which 203 were identified as white, 51 as Asian, 40 as Black and 33 as other people of color.

When asked to categorize the artwork by content, they identified 88 gender and ethnically diverse pictures which they thought portrayed middle or upper class activities related to work, school, social life or leisure, 41 pictures of entertainers or famous personalities, 32 landscapes of tourist sites, shopping malls or wealthy neighborhoods, and only four pictures which they thought depicted poor or working class conditions.

Of these last four, one was a photo of boat people contained in reading about a former Vietnamese refugee and the "remarkable story of his escape from war-torn Vietnam to success in the United States," one was a photo of garbage left over from a picnic where students were asked to

[1] Culturally based principles of reward include "'equity' (reward based on quality of performance), 'equality' (equal rewards to all regardless of performance), and 'need' (unequal rewards reflecting differential needs)" (Segall, et. al., 1990, p. 218).

describe things that bother them, and the last two were cartoons of a dilapidated apartment building where students were asked to work in pairs to match problems (e.g., curtains, garbage, grass and weeds, a painting, a street lamp) with solutions (e.g., fix, mend, mow, pick up, repair).

Much the same can be said of global issues texts. Although claiming to critically address social issues, they generally fall far short. I recently came across a lesson in a widely used textbook which purported to teach critical thinking discussion skills. It consisted of a reading on oil and natural gas reserves on the North Bank of Alaska. Following the reading, students were asked to consider the pros and cons of development over environmental protection.

Nowhere in the text, however, was mention made of Eskimos, or the fact that it is their land, or the question of the right of self determination for native and oppressed peoples. For the authors of this text, it seems, the Eskimos simply don't exist. Or, if they do, their plight is not a global issue.

Skutnabb-Kangas (1994) eloquently addresses this problem when he says, "Well-intentioned, nice teachers participate every day in committing linguistic genocide and reducing the world's linguistic and cultural diversity without being aware of it and without wanting to. It might be good to stop and think how and why" (p. 627).

Similar problems exist in the field of intercultural communication. Martin (1994) traces the history of the discipline to "the 1940s, when the Foreign Service Institute employed Edward T. Hall and other scholars to design cross-cultural education for their employees working abroad" (p. 9). Since its inception, a major paradigm in the field has been cultural relativism. This paradigm claims to be value free in that it seeks to engender respect for all cultures irrespective of their underlying political and economic structures of power and histories of development. Yet, as Bagish (1981) argues:

> Nor is it true that cultural relativity is a position of neutrality on value questions. In its tolerance and acceptance of whatever *is*, relativity is essentially lending its approval and support to the *status quo*, whatever that might be, as against any attempts to change or intervene in the *status quo*. Relativity ends up, then, as a basically conservative doctrine. (p. 36)

Based on the above considerations, I would argue that a new paradigm is in order, one which has a clear and liberating social agenda.

The Social Agenda

In making a similar appeal, Phillipson (1992), suggests that multi-disciplined teams should research such areas as race, class, gender, ethnicity, sociopolitical movements and strategies for alternative development (p. 313). Likewise, Pennycook (1990), argues "for a critical applied linguistics, because language teaching that refuses to explore the cultural and political aspects of language learning has more to do with assimilating learners than empowering them" (in Phillipson 1992, p. 15).

Following from this, I would like to suggest three ways in which we can consider a social agenda that will be meaningful for Japanese students studying culture in the foreign language classroom.

(1) As a tool for responding to the oppressive forces of monopoly capitalism which we so euphemistically call the "global economy." Simply knowing English, or possessing certain cultural artifacts about the dominant values of the privileged classes in English speaking societies may be enough to allow for the upward class mobility of the few, but it won't be enough to liberate the many.

Whether we participate in the pro[illegible]s or not, Japanese students are going to be communicating with people from a wide variety of cultures in a wide variety of languages (including English) in order to better understand how our world is changing and why. Through this process of communicating, they will also be engaged in creating new meanings, beliefs, understandings and practices about the world we live in. Here — *and this is an interesting paradox* — we have the capacity to *use* English as a tool in breaking the binds of cultural assimilation, hegemony and English language imperialism that colonialism and neocolonialism have imposed on all of us.

(2) As a tool in critically addressing global issues in a way that does not impose the late twentieth century version of "Great White Father" values on the rest of the world. In so doing, we must actively seek to root out any and all marginalizing cultural myths, values and practices which privilege the powerful, and replace them with new histories and practices which will be liberating — and here I use the word liberating in the same sense, I hope, that Paulo Freire did (Freire, 1988).

In order to accomplish this, I believe that particular attention should be placed on reexamining such mainstream intercultural communication parameters as collectivism versus individualism, power distance, traditional availability and use of resources including learning

resources, and sociohistorical contexts for learning within the community (Moll & Green, 1990; Lantoff & Appel, 1994).

(3) As a tool for learning and doing language/culture learning in its widest possible sociohistorical context. The best way to learn a foreign language is in a meaningful social context where you are learning how to do something in that language, as opposed to simply studying the language for its own sake, or for the sake of passing tests and obtaining various credentials or certificates (Pennycook, 1997).

Although this suggests a "communicative approach" to foreign language learning, I think the potential exists for something much greater. I say this because communicative language learning approaches — at least the ones we talk about most frequently in TESOL — are themselves intrinsically part of the process of cultural hegemony and linguistic imperialism.

As to exactly what this practice of learning and doing language/culture learning will be I cannot say. This is because it is a social process which is constantly changing, evolving, developing each time it is practiced. All I *can* say at this time is that as teachers, we need to look at our and our students' learning and development as a dialectical unity of creating new meanings, new tools, new cultural artifacts and new histories. In essence, then, any truly liberating social agenda will involve teachers and students working together to learn language/culture and practice change.

Sociohistorical Method

I believe that such a social agenda must be grounded in a method of analysis which moves beyond the pragmatics of language and culture learning pedagogy to engage both teacher and student in the practice of examining the sociohistorical context in which that learning is taking place.

My choice of the term sociohistorical here comes from Vygotsky and his sociohistorical school of psychology.[1] Vygotsky (1978) states, "Not only does every phenomenon have its history, but this history is characterized by changes both qualitative (changes in form and structure and basic characteristics) and quantitative" (p. 7).

[1] The term sociohistorical, although associated with Vygotsky, is generally not used in the United States because of its clear grounding in Marxism and dialectical materialism. Wertsch (1991), for example, attempts to de-Marxify Vygotsky be renaming it the school of *sociocultural* psychology (p. 16). That is, he takes history out of it.

The focus, therefore, is on the historical or developmental processes of change. In this regard, I believe we must first endeavor to study how culture and learning change by analyzing how culture, activity and nature interact and change each other. Furthermore, we must critically analyze not just how culture changes, but how the *study* of culture and learning changes as well.

This was one of Vygotsky's contributions to psychology, a contribution I would argue that needs to be extended to all fields of academia and scientific research including TESOL, intercultural communication and global issues. Rosa and Montero (1990) note how Vygotsky used this sociohistorical tool as a method of critical analysis in understanding psychology:

> From a Marxist viewpoint, history is not simply a narrative that permits an understanding of the past; rather, history relies on material bases to explain the events that have effected a particular society. In the case of the history of a science such as psychology, in order to explain the appearance of a given theory and its fate one must refer to its conceptual development, its empirical discoveries, the theoretical instruments it generates, and the external history of the discipline itself, as well as to the social or personal events that favor its development or stifle its progress. (p. 60)

As can be seen from the above description, a second key feature of sociohistorical analysis is that it is materialist. That is, in terms of its philosophical underpinnings, it sees objective material conditions (including economics and technology) as being the primary driving forces behind cultural change. This view is in keeping both with Vygotsky's sociohistorical school of psychology (Vygotsky, 1986, p. xxiii), and with Vygotsky's belief in the dialectical and historical materialism of Marx (Cole, 1974, pp. 30-31; Wertsch, 1985, p. 11; Blank, 1990, p. 40[5]).

Marx (1987) states, "The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness" (p. 263). Likewise,

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[5] "Luria (1979) remembers that Vygotsky was the chief Marxist theoretician among their study group. The severe distortions that Marxism has suffered are the reason why today many intellectuals think of it as the degraded scholasticism of Stalinism or the limited Critical Theory of Frankfurt. Both are alien to the nature of Marxism. Vygotsky's reliance on Marx's *Capital*, Engel's *Dialectics of Nature*, and Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* demonstrates his classical orientation to Marxism" (Blanck, 1990, p. 40).

Valentin Vološinov (1973), a Marxist linguist[7] argues, "Production relations and the sociopolitical order shaped by those relations determine the full range of verbal contacts between people, all the forms and means of their verbal communication — at work, in political life, in ideological creativity" (p. 19).

Third, sociohistorical analysis is dialectical in that it sees cultural beliefs and practices as further influencing our material world. It is here, on the dialectic side, that we talk about liberation and our capacity to create new cultures, new histories. It is here too that sociohistorical analysis becomes sociohistorical practice, or praxis.

This combined view of culture as (1) a sociohistorical process which (2) is driven by material necessity and (3) is further conditioned by dialectical praxis will both allow us to critically analyze and understand the processes involved in cultural change, and liberate us so that we can make new histories, new cultures. Furthermore, it is a method of analysis that teachers and students can work together in developing in the classroom.

Where To Start?

In his work with adult literacy in Brazil in the early 60s, Paulo Freire developed a concept which he called *conscientização* (often translated as "conscientization"). Brown (1974) writes that for Freire, this "is a process in which people are encouraged to analyze their reality, to become more aware of the constraints on their lives, and to take action to transform their situation. For Friere, education is either liberating or domesticating, teaching people either to be critical and free of constraints or to accept things as they are" (p. 29).

In applying Freire's process of *conscientização* to the EFL classroom in Japan, I believe it is necessary to start with where both we and our students are — that is, with our collective

[7] Both Vygotsky and Vološinov lived during the renaissance of Soviet academia. This brief period, which began with the Bolshevik Revolution and died under the purges of Stalin, was a time of great "creativity and experimentation during which attempts were made to transform every area of human life — not only politics and economics, but also art and culture, science, the family, education and labor" (Newman & Holzman, 1993, p. 6).

Wertsch and others have suggested that many of the ideas attributed to Vološinov were either authored or heavily influenced by Mikail Bakhtin of the Leningrad School, who survived Stalin's purges and whose name has since become something of a *cause célèbre* in the West. Nevertheless, as Wertsch (1991) himself admits, Bakhtin's view was "quite distinct from any kind of Hegelian or Marxist dialectic" (pp. 48-49), whereas Vološinov was clearly a Marxist.

understandings and interests — and to work from there in building a social agenda.[*] What follows is a brief description of an activity which I conducted with both students and teachers in order to gain some degree of insight as to what these collective understandings and interests in the area of culture are.

I am currently teaching EFL at the university level in Japan and decided toward the end of the first semester in 1997 to ask my students whether or not they would like to include some culture content in their classes beginning the following semester. All agreed but then asked what culture was. Rather than giving a definition per se, I responded by presenting a problem. I explained that in Japanese, a common term for this area of study was *ibunka communication*.

I then noted that the first kanji in the compound *ibunka* was *i* (also pronounced *kotonaru*), which generally translates as "strange" or "weird." This suggests what might be termed an ethnocentric view where one's own culture is seen as normal while others are thought to be weird or strange.

Following this, I pointed out that both the terms *culture* in English and *bunka* in Japanese were also problematic, or at least ambiguous in that they have more than one meaning. One meaning involves what is sometimes referred to in English as capital "C" Culture — cultural artifacts concerned primarily with the arts, music, literature and the like, which are often used to distinguish the "educated" rich from the "uneducated" poor. The second meaning of culture, I explained, was often referred to as small "c" culture and involved a more sociological or anthropological view of shared values, beliefs, customs, practices and everyday activities. Finally, I noted that communication, in its most inclusive sense, could involve any type of interaction among humans or between humans and the environment (including other life forms).

I then asked the students to divide into small groups and, based on any of the above descriptions, make a list of five things they wanted to know or learn during the semester. Next, I thought it would be useful to compare these student responses with those of teachers. I therefore conducted the same activity at three teacher training workshops where I asked participants to make group lists of five things they would like to learn/teach about culture in their classes.

[*] I further believe that such a social agenda should be open and honest rather than hidden. Hidden agendas, no matter how well meaning, are inherently demeaning since they do not engender true respect for the learner.

A Summary Of The Responses And Their Theoretical Implications

The most notable difference between student and teacher responses[9] was in the degree of specificity. Students wanted answers to highly specific questions about life in different cultures. Teachers, on the other hand, had far more general questions which reflected a higher degree of abstraction and suggested a potential for rule generation. Also, many of the teachers' questions were reflective of fairly standard dimensions used in mainstream intercultural communication. The following are some examples (more or less arbitrarily chosen) of student and teacher responses:

Table 1 - Sample Student Responses

a) In some countries people live on rice. In other countries people live on bread. Why?
b) Why do Americans and Europeans wear shoes in the house?
c) Why do Japanese work hard and live long?
d) What do people pray for in church?
e) Why don't Americans take baths like Japanese?
f) Is there class system in India?
g) What do people in other countries do after work?
h) Why do they give tips to waitresses?
i) Do foreign husbands praise their wives in public?
j) Why is there competition in entrance examinations in Japan?
k) The value of getting married.
l) How middle class people live everyday?
m) We are attracted by the free image of American school life as shown on television.
n) How many gays in the world?
o) We want to know about foreign holidays and festivals. Are they similar to Japan's?

Table 2 - Sample Teacher Responses

a) Eating habits.
b) Similarities and differences (local culture/target culture).
c) What is a stereotype? Is the definition of a stereotype different in different cultures? How?
d) Values and ethics.
e) How culture interacts with/is influenced by politics and economics.
f) Work ethic.
g) Gender issues, roles of men and women.
h) Life style of young people in different countries.
i) Family values.
j) Different motivational reasons for studying culture.
k) Thinking process, logic, decision making process.
l) Human rights.
m) What someone is really thinking who isn't fully committed to the universal culture-equality paradigm when presented with it in the classroom.
n) Classroom culture.
o) Communication styles & rhetoric.

[9] The three workshops from which teacher responses were taken were: (1) *JALT '97* in Hamamatsu in October which had approximately 40 participants, roughly 10% of whom were Japanese teachers of English; (2) at the monthly JALT Yamagata Chapter meeting in December which had 14 participants, all but one of whom was Japanese, and (3) at the Yokohama Chapter of JALT in February, 1998 which was attended by 21 participants, 17 of whom were Japanese (the Yokohama responses, while similar, are not included here because deadlines precluded analysis of the data).

These differences suggest a Vygotskian view of developmental changes in thinking processes (Vygotsky, 1978; Luria, 1979; Cole & Scribner, 1974[10]) — in this case, in the development of scientific and spontaneous concepts (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 157). Here, many of the questions asked by teachers show a level of abstraction which, according to Vygotsky, reflect the development of *scientific concepts*. Generally, scientific concepts are formally learned — often in school (Elbow, 1986), but they "lack the rich content of personal experience" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 193). The students' questions, on the other hand, appear less generalizable and concern specifics of everyday life in different cultures. Such questions are *spontaneous* in that they derive from concrete experience but may be difficult to articulate without the prior development of scientific concepts[11].

Vygotsky (1986) claims that the "strength of scientific concepts lies in their conscious and deliberate character. Spontaneous concepts, on the contrary, are strong in what concerns the situational, empirical, and practical" (p. 94). Thus, an ESL teacher in an English speaking country might use the scientific concept *exploitation* without having knowingly experienced it herself, while one of her students might find it difficult to articulate spontaneous feelings of alienation and marginality caused by exploitation. These contradictions, or "contraries" as Elbow (1986) calls them, can only be resolved through the continual interpenetration of the two:

> Vygotsky asserts then that two contrasting motions are necessary for the interpenetration of these two types of concepts. Spontaneous or experientially learned concepts are helped "upward," as it were, to self-conscious understanding by the path of the scientific or formally learned concepts "downward." But scientific concepts are only helped downward or fully experienced — and thus fully able to be applied to unfamiliar instances — to the extent that spontaneous concepts have worked their way up to actualize them. (pp. 18-19)

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[10] Cole & Scribner (1974), explain Vygotsky's view of thinking processes and how they change: "[Vygotsky] tried to take account of both the general unchanging aspects of thinking processes and their specific, historically changing aspects by making a distinction between elementary psychophysical processes such as "sensation, movement, elementary forms of attentions and memory [which] are undoubtedly natural functions of the nervous tissue" and "higher psychological functions (voluntary memory, active attention, abstract thought and voluntary movement) [which] cannot be understood as direct functions of the brain" (Luria, 1971, p. 260). These higher processes are organized into *functional systems*, which arise in the course of historically determined practical and theoretical activities and change with the nature of these activities" (p. 31).

[11] Based on experiments which showed children could explain scientific concepts such as "exploitation" before spontaneous concepts such as "brother," Vygotsky concludes that the development of scientific concepts runs ahead of the development of spontaneous concepts.

Returning to the ESL teacher and her student, then, the self-conscious awareness of exploitation as a scientific concept can be helped upward by the teacher while the spontaneous realization on the part of the teacher that she too is living in a society which exploits her can be helped downward by the student. Taken together as a dialectical unity, this downward movement of scientific concepts leading spontaneous concepts up to produce awareness and deliberate control, forms what Vygotsky terms the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

The Role Of The ZPD

For us as teachers, the most significant practical implication of the ZPD (and thus all learning and development) is its social nature. All activity within this zone appears twice: 'first on the social level and later on the individual level... This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.57). This means that the ZPD is not just a diagnostic measure of development (as, for example, reflected in Tables 2 & 3), it is also the crucial variable to take into account in creating pedagogy (Holzman & Newman, 1993, p. 69).

The ZPD in Pedagogy

This understanding of a socially constructed ZPD frees us (indeed, it also requires us) to move beyond the psychology of the individual student (or individual teacher-student dyad) in our classrooms and develop a pedagogy which embodies our collective social histories as teachers, students, family members, members of communities, members of socioeconomic classes, members of exploitative neocolonialist societies, etc., etc.

Here, let me turn to a personal example to illustrate the point. I grew up working class in what was then a fairly wealthy New York suburb. Class contradictions abounded: all of us knew who the college-track kids were and, when the Vietnam War came along, who would be going off to fight. This was something which was part of our spontaneous, everyday, real-life existence.

Yet, open and honest discussion of our collective class and social histories in school was taboo. Our teachers never used words like 'class" except in the context of "American class mobility" (which in our textbooks was contrasted with 'the caste system of India"). As a result, we were never able to connect 'class" as a scientific concept to our spontaneous everyday reality in a way that could

lead to self awareness and volitional activity as active agents in the process of positive social change and — dare I say it — liberation.

Instead, unconscious class antagonisms would occasionally burst to the surface, often in the form of some destructive act where we — as the victims of an unjust class society — wound up being punished, dumbed out, criminalized, maybe sent off to reform school or to war, maybe even killed. Things along this continuum happened to me, to my friends, to others I barely knew — from people of color to the sons and daughters of working class European immigrants, but not the rich.

My argument (and I believe Vygotsky's as well) is that if we deny the reality of our collective social histories, or try to separate those histories from learning and development (which is what we do when we treat cognition and affect as separate — or separable — entities), we do untold injury to both ourselves and our students. At best, we become jaded. We degenerate[12] to something less than what we were when we started out to become teachers.

In support of this argument for a socially conscious ZPD are research findings (D. Newman, Griffin & Cole, 1984; Moll & Greenberg, 1990[13]; Tudge, 1990) which indicate "that creating a classroom environment that allows the social nature of learning to be expressed leads to increased learning" (Newman & Holzman, 1993, pp. 70-71). This, in turn, fits with Vygotsky's (1986) claim that "scientific concepts develop under the conditions of systematic cooperation between the child and the teacher" (p. 148).

Here, although Vygotsky uses the expression "systematic cooperation between the child and the teacher," it may be worthwhile to point out that in creating a cooperative social pedagogy of learning (which is what the ZPD really is), the teacher doesn't always have to lead the students in the traditional sense. Not only can the ZPD operate in a conventional teacher-student role, it can also operate among peers or where somebody who is not a teacher plays that role. John Holt (1982) relates such an example where the ZPD might be at work:

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[12] We may become: (1) motivation junkies, desperately searching for that illusive "fix", "trick", "reward" to get our students (and us) through the day, (2) impotent guidance counselors, probation officers, reform school teachers, blaming our students for everything, (3) stoic hangers-on, submitting to our coercive roles as warders of the gate until we can collect retirement, or (3) disillusioned reformers who simply quit the profession (service industry) altogether.

[13] Moll and Greenberg (1990), for example, have turned to the working-class social networks, or *confianzas*, of their Mexican student community in Tucson, AZ., to teach literacy (pp. 319-348).

> Years ago I read that one or more inner-city schools had tried the experiment of letting fifth graders teach first graders to read. They found, first, that the first graders learned faster than similar first graders taught by trained teachers, and secondly, that the fifth graders who were teaching them, many or most of whom had not been good readers themselves, also improved a great deal in their reading. (p. 36)

Along a similar vein, I have found that I am often better at teaching my eight-year-old son science than geography even though (or because) I know far less about the former than the latter. Because I know less about science, we tend to learn together in a cooperative setting where I am more of a resource person than the source of knowledge (i.e., the focus is more on the process than the product)[14].

Also, we should avoid the assumption that teachers think only in abstract scientific terms while students think only concretely based on spontaneous experiences. Depending upon the type of activity/development, the opposite may just as easily be the case[15]. In a recent discussion class, for example, students chose to talk about things they had learned both in and outside of school. They mentioned such scientific concepts as cooperation, thoughtfulness and punctuality while I, as the teacher, thought of more spontaneous experiences like my mother teaching me how to tie a Windsor knot when I was in either kindergarten or first grade.

The ZPD in Diagnosis

Finally, let us turn to the ZPD in diagnosis. Here, we must also keep in mind that the ZPD is not a *thing* but a *process* where we are taking socially constructed inputs and constantly reshaping them through social activity (Newman & Holzman, 1996). We can call this activity the activity of acquiring "skills" if we want (e.g., study skills, critical thinking skills, etc.). And we can extrapolate levels of development from the ZPD as a diagnostic measure to assess who has and hasn't acquired these skills. However, there is a danger that if we do, we will wind up focusing on the product and not the process.

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[14] This can actually be liberating for the ESOL teacher who is asked to teach a content-based course in an area which she lacks expertise.

[15] Nor should we assume that abstract thinking on the part of teachers necessarily reflects a higher degree of social consciousness. Often, the opposite is true *because* of what Rose (1989) calls the "canonization" of our training as teachers, which "encourages a narrowing of focus from learning to that which must be learned: it simplifies the dynamic tension between student and text and reduces the psychological and social dimensions of instruction" (p. 235).

The result is liable to be some kind of Piagetian scaffolding, where development is equated with levels of achievement, similar to the rungs of a ladder — rather than Vygotsky's ZPD. This, in turn, will open the door to "experts" in remediation and special education whose only real expertise in my opinion will be in treating "what are essentially structural problems... with symptomological solutions" (Holzman, 1997, p. 5).

Instead, I see the diagnostic process more along the lines of taking a Sunday drive with everybody in the car simultaneously looking for a fun place to have a picnic and go swimming. The diagnosis in this case includes all of the bantering about "the picnic table has to be in the shade" and "I see a good grassy spot to play catch" and "the beach over there's too crowded" and "wow, look at those giant waves" and "the waves can't be too tall — remember junior" and "I have to go to the bathroom" and "there's no place to park" and "we should have stopped back at the first place" and "why don't we try further up?"...

Likewise, the diagnostic process for the curriculum design of a content-based EFL class on intercultural communication might involve us as students and teachers expressing a variety different scientific and spontaneous concepts about our collective social understandings and interests (i.e., contraries) in whatever appears to affect our lives or have some grounding for us. Even in cases where differences do not immediately surface, we will still be creating contraries (and thus ZPDs) if in the diagnostic process we listen to what our students are really saying (as opposed to what we think they are saying or think they should be saying).

By listening more and evaluating less (or, at least evaluating in a different way[16]), we will be creating ZPDs that will produce greater mutual respect and less dumbing out. Or to phrase it in a more traditional way, if we spend more time discovering what our students have to offer and less time diagnosing their linguistic and cultural deficits, we both will benefit.

This last consideration may be of particular interest to educators working for institutions that rely heavily on diagnostic measurement given what Edge (1996) describes as sociopolitical forces which are imposing greater conformity and standardization in an environment where teachers are

[16] Needless to say, we are all evaluating all of the time. But by listening more, we may learn to become more accepting of ambiguity. This is particularly important for teachers who work in institutions where there are standardized tests or diagnostic measures which claim to identify specific skills or stages of development.

being trained "to deliver a basic education to a mass work force that is to be prepared just sufficiently to service incoming capital investment" (p. 13).

From Theory To Praxis

Looked at from the point of liberation pedagogy, I believe that we as students and teachers can be our own best diagnosticians — particularly if allowed by policing institutions, agencies and officials to compare and contrast our collective social histories, self awarenesses and interests. This will bring out any underlying contraries, following which we can employ sociohistorical analysis as a tool to further critically examine our respective realities.

I believe that if we have learned to critically analyze and understand the processes involved in cultural change, we will have more freedom to pick and choose those cultural beliefs, values, behaviors and practices we think are worthwhile. In so doing, we will be making new histories, new cultures, developing *conscientização*. In essence, this is what Freire did in Brazil and why his literacy program was so successful (so successful, in fact, that it was seen as a threat to those in power: he was arrested and his program shut down by the government).

In applying Freire's process of *conscientização* to the EFL classroom in Japan, I began by contrasting student and teacher understandings and interests. This revealed developmental changes in thinking processes (abstract vs. concrete) and concept formation (scientific vs. spontaneous). Taken in isolation, neither theoretical abstractions by themselves nor concrete experiences by themselves, will lead to *conscientização*. However, taken together as a dialectical unity, the reverse movement of these processes and concepts form ZPDs that we as students and teachers can use to explore our collective social histories and realities.

By way of example, I noted earlier that an ESL teacher might help her student develop the self-conscious awareness of exploitation as a scientific concept while that same student might help the teacher develop a spontaneous realization that she too is living in a society (dare we say even working for an institution?) which exploits her. Likewise, taken together as a dialectical unity, the reverse movement of the scientific and spontaneous concepts found in the student and teacher questions about culture may form ZPDs that we can use to explore our collective social histories.

While it is not the purpose of this paper to become overly involved in issues of classroom technique[17], it might be worthwhile to mention in passing that one technique my students and I are developing is to work together as ethnographers and historians. Ethnographic work has included the keeping of diaries to record our own behaviors as well as the behaviors of each other, of friends and relatives, of strangers in public and of people in scenes from movies, videos and television programs. It has also included having students and teachers present anecdotal evidence for particular beliefs, values, etc., in the form of short group and individual reports, stories, family and community oral histories and recollections from specific experiences. In working together as historians, we have occasionally attempted to critically analyze historical events[18], look for causal relationships in two seemingly unrelated synchronic events (e.g., the closing of Japan and Cromwell's Rebellion), or collect different regional and national accounts of past events in order to compile a more global view of history.

We have also begun (but only begun) to experiment with performance where we exchange student and teacher roles, or try new ones as revolutionaries, liberators, makers of history and culture, as well as enforcers of class privilege and inequalities of power, ogres, dictators, prison guards, school administrators, etc. Newman and Holzman, who have worked extensively with the relationship of meaning-making to performance and play (Newman & Holzman, 1993; Newman & Holzman, 1996; Holzman, 1997), argue that while in everyday situations, action dominates meaning, in play, meaning dominates action. This creates a zone of proximal development where the learner behaves beyond his or her everyday ability (Newman & Holzman, 1993, pp. 99-100).

Finally, it should be noted that the more we as students and teachers are able together to expose educational hierarchies and barriers to learning and development, the freer we will be to practice new learning techniques (and vice versa). This should also lead to a greater willingness on our part as teachers to allow into our classes different learning techniques which have until now been

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[17] many of the techniques will be generated either by the students themselves or by the students and teachers working together through the *practice* of sociohistorical method, and will thus change from one classroom situation to another.

[18] In a writing class, one group of students chose to do an EAP project on the causes of the US Civil War. Interestingly, their Japanese language sources gave a far more detailed account of the economic causes than the English language sources did.

dichotomized into opposing factions in support of either creative productivity or rote memorization[19], monolingual[20] or bilingual teaching, and communicative approaches or grammar translation.

Discussion

This, in essence then, is one recipe for learning culture: practicing change. Its ingredients are: (1) a materialist self consciousness of how culture changes in time and in space; (2) a sociohistorical analysis of culture as concrete activity driven by economic and technological need supported by politics and power structures; (3) new volitional activity which will change our beliefs and values in such a way as to redirect our activities and in so doing further change us.

I believe this recipe addresses the three criteria I listed earlier for creating a social agenda that would be meaningful for Japanese students studying culture in the foreign language classroom. Those criteria were that a social agenda must be a tool which can be used by students in (1) responding to the oppressive forces of monopoly capitalism, (2) critically addressing global issues, and (3) learning and doing language/culture learning in its widest possible sociohistorical context.

There is, of course, an easier and less subversive[21] alternative to all of this. It is what Freire refers to as internalizing the consciousness of the oppressor: that we simply reinforce cultural myths and ethnocentric stereotypes which idealize sociopolitically and economically dominant elements within a given society. In so doing, we will also be helping to make new histories and cultures. But they will not be ours.

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[19] See Pennycook (1996) for elaboration.

[20] Phillipson (1992) claims that the fallacy that English is best taught monolingually by a native speaker is a tenet which grew out of the Commonwealth Conference on the Teaching of English as a Second Language, held at Makerere, Uganda in 1961 (pp. 183-193).

[21] I use the term not as H. Douglas Brown did in his 1996 TESOL plenary speech, *The Art of Subversive Teaching*, but as I had hoped he would have.

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